

measure of Schoenberg's success in his biblical opera. It is intensified by what seems at first to stand in its way: the inordinate complexity of the music. This leads to the liberation of Schoenberg's supreme talent, his gift for combination, his precise grasp of distinct but simultaneous events. The idea of unity in diversity becomes a sensuous musical reality in him. He was able not just to imagine, but actually to invent complexes of opposed extremes, which yet occur simultaneously. In this respect he represents the culmination of the tradition in which every detail is composed. This talent reveals his metaphysical ingenuity. The unity of what he had imagined truly does justice to the idea which forms the subject of the text. The striking effect and the unity of the disparate are one and the same. Hence the simplicity of the end result. The complexity is nowhere suppressed, but is so shaped as to become transparent. If everything in the score is clearly heard, its very clarity means that it is heard as a synthesis.

In *Die glückliche Hand*, which comes the closest to *Moses und Aron* as regards complexity, layers or bands were superimposed upon each other. Here they are transformed into actual lines. Instead of superimposed layers we now have an interlocking totality. But the fact that the combinatorics are not, as the stereotyped criticism of Schoenberg would have it, intellectual excogitations, but are instead sensuous realities, and the fact that they live in the imagination, in the living idea, is something more than a subjective, psychological aspect of the process of composition. It stands in the profoundest relationship to the substance of the music. When Schoenberg was once asked about a piece that had not yet been performed, 'So you haven't heard it yourself?', he replied, 'Yes, I have. When I wrote it.' In such a process of the imagination, the sensuous is directly spiritualized without losing any of its concrete specificity. What was realized in the imagination thereby became an objective unity. It is as if Schoenberg's musical mind recapitulated that movement from the tribal gods to monotheism, the story of which is encapsulated in *Moses und Aron*. If our epoch refuses to vouchsafe to us a sacred work of art, it does at its close give birth to the possibility of something under whose gaze the bourgeois age was ushered in. (1963)

Music and New Music

In memory of Peter Suhrkamp

What is best in the new responds to an ancient need.

Paul Valéry, *Rhumbs*

In one of my last conversations with Peter Suhrkamp he remarked on the titles of a number of the pieces in my *Klangfiguren* and commented, 'Why do you still keep on talking about new music? People have long since abandoned such terms in the world of painting, whereas you cling desperately to this one in music.' I should like to reply to my late friend as best I may. Of course, I shall hardly be able to confine my comments simply to the question of nomenclature. It is clearly necessary to reproduce some of the complex considerations which the question raised, in the hope that I shall be able to get to the heart of the matter. To begin with, a term so well established inevitably becomes suspect. It presumably came into being in connection with the German title of the Internationale Gesellschaft für neue Musik [The International Society for New Music] which had begun from the early twenties to foster every trend in music which was making efforts to distance itself from the New German school, from Impressionism and from the vestiges of other nineteenth-century tendencies. Just how adventitious that name was is revealed by the English title of the very same organization, the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), which replaces the polemical 'new' with the neutral, chronological 'contemporary'. It is the latter term which more aptly described its programmes.

If we were to review today what was performed at those festivals, only a very small proportion of it would be included in what we may nowadays think of as new music. There were countless concerti grossi and suites, wind serenades and other mechanical productions which would sound, once the superficial glaze of dissonance had been breached, just as old-fashioned and perhaps even more boring than anything by Raff or Draesecke. The only works to have retained any of the aura of strangeness, of something essentially different, which attached itself even to timid and compromised compositions forty years ago, are those which seemed eccentric at the time. This means the works of the Viennese school and the youthful pieces of Stravinsky and Bartok.

As a concept 'new music' seems to share the fate of growing old which has so often been its destiny in the past. The fact that people continue to use the term as if it referred to something self-contained and unrelated to what had gone before and what continues to fill the opera houses, concert halls and the ether, tends to erect a wall around the music itself and to neutralize it instead of promoting its cause. The expression actually provokes the idiotic question, 'Is this really music at all?' This is the question which enables the outraged listener to unburden himself of his own indignation by classifying the object of his hatred as a special case which may indeed have its own legitimacy, along with so much else that has stood the test of time, but which really only concerns the experts because it does not come into the category of music proper.

The concept of 'new music' simply confirms the way it is institutionalized in studios, special societies and concerts. Such organizations inadvertently negate its claims to truth and hence universal appeal, even though without them its cause would be hopelessly lost. We are reminded of the American division of musical programmes into 'popular' and 'classical', which serves up to the 'fans' what they want,¹ while relieving them of the trouble of making any choice other than between those simple

1. Adorno used the English words.

alternatives. In the meantime most of what the ISCM attacked has died a natural death, at least this side of the Iron Curtain, and no one imagines any longer that he ought to compose in the style of Bauszner and Hausegger, or Georg Schumann and Max Trapp, or even to include their junk in the concert repertoire. This suggests that the term has lost its point. Its emotional force no longer has an enemy to strike and its own usage cannot remain unaffected by its harmlessness.

Despite all this it is no accident that the epithet 'new' has survived in music and not in painting. It marks the fact of an abrupt, qualitative leap, whereas analogous changes in painting are distributed over a longer period and go much further back in time. Even in its most recent development music has proved to be a belated art, a 'latecomer'² who runs through the different phases all the more briskly. But the prime fact about the new music was that it signalled a change in the tonal system.

Painting has no direct equivalent to tonality. In painting the relationship to an object-world which is to be represented, a relationship which has been disrupted by the modern movement, goes back well beyond the age of tonality in music. Moreover it is not directly connected with the forms and colours which constitute the material of painting. It would appear that a musical language which renounces those features that have become second nature – the triads, the major and minor scales, the distinction between consonance and dissonance, and ultimately all the categories that spring from these – is far more exacting than the innovations in painting. It is doubtless true that these developments in music did not come about overnight and can be traced back over a hundred years, to *Tristan*. It is no less true that the elements and problems of the new music are all rooted in the musical tradition.

But none of this alters the fact that for the majority of people, thanks to their experiences ever since their early childhood, their education and the overwhelming predominance of everything that inundates them in the name of music, the new music is

2. Adorno used the English word.

experienced as something which deviates from their fixed notions as to what constitutes music. Their listening habits, which suffice in their view to enable them to deal with everything from Monteverdi to Richard Strauss, do not give them access to Schoenberg, Webern or Boulez. The changes which have taken place in music are not simply a matter of style, content or the specific character of the works. There is really no comparison with earlier innovations, such as those of the Mannheim school, Viennese Classicism or Wagner.

This explains why, when confronted with the new music, the reductive argument that everything is subject to the historical process and that every new phenomenon was rejected at first, seems so impotent, hackneyed and self-serving. Even Strauss, whose boldest strokes were genuine caprioles which unquestionably dealt the system a severe blow, finished by reinforcing it all the more powerfully. The closing section of his otherwise brilliant *Elektra* is a case in point. The same may be said of Max Reger's pan-chromaticism, whose ceaseless modulations deprived the fixed key concept of its structural meaning. Nevertheless, in the construction of individual sonorities and their immediate relationships he maintains the traditional system and nowhere violates the sacrosanct taboos imposed by the listener's expectations.

It is doubtless the case that of all the works that have sailed under the flag of the new music, through its different phases right down to its latest manifestations in Darmstadt, only a few will have wholly satisfied its ideal of a language purified of the vestiges of tonality and organized exclusively in terms of its own elements, without regard to the traditional system. Apart from the products of the Viennese school, all the works which passed for the new music for forty years turn out to be permeated with the residues of tonality and to this day it is not yet clear whether music can or should even wish to divest itself of it entirely, if only as its negation, as long as it clings to such concepts as octave equivalences.

Nevertheless, it is not entirely wrong to have included in the canon of new music the compromising and especially the neo-Classical works of the successors and imitators of Hindemith

and Stravinsky. People felt that tonality was only vegetating, leading a sort of shadow existence, without any of the vigour of its former self. It often seemed to be appealed to by a consciousness that was looking for something to hold on to, an order inaccessible to itself. In this it was not unlike that deceptive similarity to models of the world of objects which Picasso made use of, and not just in his few neo-Classical years.

The irrevocable change continued to have its repercussions, even where people were unwilling to admit to its existence. Difficult though it may be to point to a particular year or a particular work as marking the end of tonality, it is nevertheless quite mistaken to insist, as well-intentioned and naive musicians frequently do, on the essential unity and continuity of all music and even on an unending dialogue of geniuses down the centuries, from Bach to Schoenberg.

Schoenberg and Berg rejected the word 'atonal' as defamatory. And indeed if it were interpreted literally, as music without tones, it would be utter nonsense. Yet Schoenberg's peculiarly conservative naivety may have played a role in leading him to repudiate a term which has as much to be said for it as a slogan as the Gueux in the remote past³ and Dada almost fifty years ago. 'Atonal' registers with some precision the shock-waves caused by the new music. This shock was in fact an integral part of it and was moderated the instant that people began to replace atonality with twelve-note music, as if that were a completely new musical system. This aside, it may be said in Schoenberg's defence that he was also opposed to this reification of technique. After all, the reification only aimed to come to the aid of the ear which was drifting around helplessly on an ocean of new sounds, the discovery of which Webern ascribed to Schoenberg some fifty years ago. To speak of atonal music is still to express something more than the affirmative and dogmatic belief that the rows are

3. Les Gueux or ragamuffins. This was the nickname assumed by the first revolutionaries in Holland in 1665. When the Duchess of Parma asked Count Berlaymont about them, he told her they were 'the scum and offscouring of the people' (*les gueux*). This having been made public the revolutionaries took the name in defiance. See Motley, *Dutch Republic*, vol. 2, p. 6.

the source of a new feeling of security whose dubious nature has meanwhile become all too evident in philosophy.⁴ Much recent music, especially the music that has been influenced by John Cage, could undoubtedly be called atonal rather than dodeca-phonic.

The sociological merits of the term 'new music' also merit some scrutiny. For whereas there is scarcely any new musical production which has contrived to elude the pressure set up by the new music, the realms of reproduction and consumption have remained loyal to the tonal tradition, apart from those carefully segregated enclaves which are reserved for the new. It is this quarantining of the new music, this astronomic distance between its fully fledged idiom and the traditional language that promotes the ossification of the allegedly eternal language of music. It may be supposed that, with the division into highbrow and lowbrow music and its immediate continuation, the official world of music, rather less new music slips through the net than was the case before the different stages of the history of music had been compartmentalized.

Nor is this situation changed by elevating the classics of modernism to the pantheon where they are now the subject of occasional acts of worship. Such formal institutionalization only serves to distort their achievement. The all-powerful culture industry says, Stop! and confines itself to its unvarying constants, as in its non-musical media, above all the film. Thus the circle is closed. With the whole system tending towards encapsulation and rightly mistrustful of the truth, the culture industry is terrified of any unregimented sound, however impotent, just as in the Third Reich the authorities trembled at Marquis Posa's call for a modest freedom of thought.⁵ The more problematic the overall situation has become in the light of the vast increase in

4. Adorno uses the term *Geborgenheit*, safety or security. In his eyes the term is questionable because of its central position in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

5. The Marquis von Posa is the idealistic hero of Schiller's *Don Carlos*. Although the Nazis attempted to promote Schiller as a German nationalist, his resounding calls for more freedom frequently had to be censored.

technical and human forces, the more it comes to constitute a threat to the very people who compose it. The more systematically every chance to improve matters is wasted and compromised by usurpers, then the greater are the efforts made to hammer into a helpless mankind the conviction that nothing can be other than it is and that the basic categories of present conditions are those of life itself, true and immutable.

This tendency extends its tentacles into the innermost recesses of cultural politics, even though individual organizations and responsible people may remain quite unconscious of what is happening. It is only too easy to justify this by reference to the intellectual opinions of the majority whose only desires are for the things with which they are being force-fed and who regard any attempt to unmask the deception as a threat to the very comfort in which they do not even wholeheartedly believe. The new music may continue to assert its own newness, but only as long as it refuses to join this vicious circle. Hence its critical and aesthetic self-understanding also has an objective social dimension.

But society's response also has a bearing on its content, regardless of whether its reception be thwarted or calculated in advance. It might easily be imagined that the mere fact of its nonconformism, of its inaccessibility to the mass of the population, is too abstract to tell us anything about its specific nature. The non-representational nature of music, a quality arising from its non-conceptual material, and its resistance to handy theses, allow free rein to even its more wayward products, and it has every reason to be grateful for this. Moreover, this is a defect it shares with every articulate art which refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the ignominious common denominator known as a 'statement'. But this does not at all imply that its content is neutral. The reactionaries of every kind who set up an organized protest in the years before Hitler and who are now once again emerging from their bolt-holes, have understood this better than those friends of art who imagine that they are disseminating important insights into the new music by counting rows and other equally innocuous clerical services.

The new music suffers from the practised and the all-too-familiar, from which it differs so profoundly. It impotently takes up arms against the way of the world; its posture is aggressive. In its desire to submit only to its internal law and to mutiny against the law of demand, its subject, its potential being, which is concealed even from itself, expresses itself in highly concrete form. Its qualities become manifest in what it prohibits. This did not escape the notice of Schoenberg who would have been only too delighted to be a great composer like the predecessors he revered. When a Hollywood film mogul wanted to give him a contract to write some background music and greeted him with a compliment about his '*lovely music*', Schoenberg is said to have shouted at him in fury, 'My music is not lovely'.⁶ He was not given the contract.

The aggression which the new music directs against the established norms even now, after thirty years, an aggression in which something of the violence of surrealist onslaughts still survives, has its own specific tone; it is a tone of menace. It has ceased to be the tone which expresses individual feeling. On the contrary, it has been brought about by bracketing out the subject. It is not for nothing that indignant readers' letters associate many compositions with catastrophes and panic. Among the more advanced scores today there are a number which sound literally as if they were 'out of this world',⁷ as the Americans would say. This aggressive tone intensifies with the rigour with which an integrated construction refuses to communicate the homely traces of the humane. It stems from a correct perception of the reified alienation and depersonalization of the destiny imposed on mankind and of the inability of the human sensibility to modify that destiny.

The tone of the new music expresses its horror that even fear is no longer able to intervene between the subject and what is done to him: that destiny has become monstrous and overwhelming. Only through the imageless image of dehumanization can this music retain a hold on the image of humanity. Wherever it

6. In English in the original.

7. In English in the original.

follows the phrasemongers and sets out to serve mankind, perhaps by allowing man to speak directly, it puts a false gloss on the existing state of affairs and debases itself. Only with this mute utterance can it articulate itself. Only by taking the odium of dehumanization upon itself can it redeem the precept of autonomy, of the pure elaboration of the material in hand in all its aspects which has accompanied music throughout its subjective phase ever since it liberated itself from ritual. Only by ceasing to be 'lovely'⁸ can it provide an intimation of beauty. Its gesture of menace is unmistakable when it discards its internal logic as a mere semblance [*Schein*] and throws itself on the mercy of chance. John Cage's Piano Concerto, whose only meaning and internal coherence is to be found in its rejection of every notion of coherent meaning, presents us with catastrophe music at its most extreme.

This change in social function has utterly transformed the nature of music. Bourgeois music was decorative, even in its greatest achievements. It made itself pleasant to people, not just directly, to its listeners, but objectively, going far beyond them by virtue of its affirmation of the ideas of humanism. It was given notice to quit because it had degenerated into ideology, because its reflection of the world in a positive light, its call for a better world, became a lie which legitimated evil. The effect of cancelling its contract reverberates in the most sensitive sublimations of musical form. Hence the right to speak of new music.

Nevertheless, it has its limitations. We become conscious of them when confronted by that hydra-headed question, 'Is that really music at all?' For the only way to answer it is with an emphatic, Yes. Nor does this answer need to confine itself to a tactical retreat to physical or psychological definitions, such as the assertion that new music, too, makes use of musical sounds, and not just noises, and that although these sounds are differently arranged, the arrangement has its own order. For in the meantime, the noises which had always acted as a yeast in the production of musical effects have been absorbed into the sound

8. In English in the original.

relationships by a continuous series of transitions and to an extent hitherto undreamed of.

This notwithstanding, the new music is still music because all its categories, though not identical with traditional categories, are in a sense identical with them – because in all of its refusals, in everything which it denies itself, the force of what is forbidden is stored up. It is mediated by professional expertise [*Metier*], a concept which ranks highly among its contemporary exponents, sometimes to the point of fetishism. Nothing is tolerated unless it is articulated down to the last note. If it is true that quality in music depends on whether a composition is exhaustively composed out, without any crude, unformed remnant, then it may be said that the new music satisfies this criterion in full measure.⁹ And it cannot even take the credit for it. The disappearance of all syntactical and grammatical paradigms, of all lexical tokens, forces it unremittingly to generate connections from within itself, connections which no longer emanate from elsewhere, and if they did they would be dismissed as alien. For this reason it is only possible to do justice to the situation by dint of the most rigid technical control, technique being understood here in the radical sense of realization, not in the comfortable sense of the manipulation of allegedly tried and proven means. Nevertheless the strength to accomplish this is derived from whatever forces had organized all older music, frequently from behind the façade of tonality.

Equally important as this commitment to technique is the allergic reaction to even the remotest derivatives of traditional music. Nothing from the past is absorbed without first being deconstructed. This is most clearly demonstrated in electronic music, whose most consistent adherents eschew everything reminiscent of the usual sound effects and who strive to extract from the new material sounds that are peculiar to it and qualitatively different from the traditional instruments. But this

9. Cf. the radio discussion on Music for Young People broadcast by North German Radio in April 1959. In addition to Adorno Dofflein, Oberborbeck, Vötterle and Warner took part. [Adorno's note.]

allergy towards the residue of the traditional musical language is the starting point of a new idiom. Nowadays we react incomparably more sensitively to anything false in the new music than we did thirty years ago. There is general agreement about this.

Riegl's thesis about the decay of the power to form a style is doubtless obsolete, in music as in painting. The growing convergence of all modern music, regardless of its country of origin, is a consequence of the situation. The more consistently an artist allows himself to be guided by this, without resolving to compose his music according to a preconceived general idea, the closer he will come to the idea of the style which extends beyond individual artists. Even today a canon of what is possible and what is impossible may already be discerned. Admittedly it is one which is no longer validated by society, but is hostile to social validation itself. The organization of time as space now becomes a serious preoccupation, whereas in Stravinsky it had still manifested itself as an 'as if', perhaps as the troubled dream of what was to come. Now serial manipulation is to make time malleable, to take it captive. No longer open-ended, it seems to have been made space-like. This is not the consequence of a violent process. But nor should we pass over in silence the profound difficulty that the time continuum is not literally 'simultaneous', as the rational organization of time would suggest. We can scarcely imagine it in isolation from its development from below, from its birth in the impulse of the moment.

This points objectively, in terms of the material of music, to the necessary place of the subject in music and hence the factor with which it has to come to grips in the present. We might speculate whether the integral rationality to which music aspires is at all compatible with the dimension of time, and whether rationality, as the power of the equal and quantitative does not actually negate the unequal and qualitative from which the dimension of time cannot be separated. It is not for nothing that all rationalizing tendencies, those in the real world even more than in aesthetics, aspire to the abolition of traditional procedures and hence, in effect, of history as well. The integration and total elaboration of time may well destroy it, as is not unfitting in an

age whose subjects increasingly relinquish their control over their memory. However that may be, these trends have their effect on what might be called the ontology of art. Whereas music comes closer to painting, Tachist painting draws nearer to music, right down to the plethora of individual significances – equivalent to the groups of notes or tones – and to the dynamic element, all of which was alien to traditional painting.

The new musical language is encoded as the positive negation of the traditional one, but it cannot be reduced to the triviality that composers simply wanted to do something new and different – a critical platitude that applies to everything and nothing and amounts simply to the tautology that in the history of art early developments are succeeded by later ones. What is meant, rather, is that the new music constitutes a critique of the old one. Its enemies are well aware of this and this is why they raise such a hullabaloo about the undermining of tradition. Hence anyone who identifies with the new music should stand by this critical element instead of striving for acceptance.

This is not a matter on which Schoenberg has given us his reflections. But he detested such famous nineteenth-century melodies as the stretta in *Trovatore*, because you know the main rhythmic motives after the first four bars and because it is an insult to the musical intelligence to repeat them so complacently. In responding in this way he intuitively revealed not just an attitude which implicitly informs every note of the new music, but also an objective state of affairs. For the ideological element in traditional music, its affirmative aspect, affects not only its general stance, its assertion that this is what music is and how it should be, but it also betrays itself in constant stupidities and incongruities. The works of the past, at least since the end of the Rococo, gain in importance in proportion to the resoluteness with which they give shape to their own negation, instead of concealing it behind the smooth surface of their sensuous flow. This is the basis of the greatness of Beethoven's last works.

It was as impossible to synthesize the tonal system and the individual musical impulse as to harmonize the bourgeois order with the interests and passions of its subjects. This has left its

mark on every piece of traditional music that lays claim to such unity. The compulsion to establish a form by repeating entire complexes, the rigid, thing-like nature of the recapitulations, even in Brahms and Reger, is only the most obvious symptom of a failure which goes well beyond the will and the capacities of individual composers. The law of affirmation has long since ceased to provide standards of musical quality. Again and again composers of the stature of Schubert, Chopin, Debussy and Richard Strauss were seduced into sacrificing integrity of structure to the need to conciliate. The repugnance aroused by these insinuating, ingratiating gestures, which have wormed their way into even the greatest works, forms part of the pathos of a qualitatively new music.

The bourgeois musical tradition had always contained an element of incongruity. It offered an internal musical explanation for the discontinuity of music history, something which of course also has social implications. This discontinuity increased with rocket-like rapidity. More and more mediating historical links were consumed in accordance with the principle of an intensified rationality. But the discrepancies that arise from relinquishing control of the historical tendency, on the one hand, and the possibility of appropriating it through living experience, on the other, should not be misused in order to provide a vindication of those works which have not survived. Today the tradition has been definitively disrupted, but it was never free of internal fractures. This is why an account of the history of music since 1600 in terms of *Geistesgeschichte* [history of the spirit]¹⁰ is so inappropriate.

It is not the case that, starting from that caesura, music blindly progressed in an organic fashion. In fact, in harmony with the rationalizing tendencies of the bourgeois era, it strove at the same time to obtain control of itself. There is a programmatic strand proclaiming the primacy of the new which runs from Caccini's

10. *Geistesgeschichte* describes the way in which cultural phenomena become subsumed under a single spirit of the age [*Zeitgeist*], such as Gothic or Baroque, and are viewed as its direct manifestations. In consequence it tends to underplay, if not ignore, contradictions and conflicting tendencies.

Nuove Musiche right through to Wagner's art-work of the future. And even the Middle Ages played the *Ars Nova* off against the *Ars Antiqua*. This may suggest an explanation of the curious combination of autonomous composition and pedagogic exercise that characterizes some of Bach's most powerful instrumental works. They were conceived not simply as compositions, but also as exercises which would enable the composer to get such a grip on the musical material that the difference between it and the musical subject might one day vanish.

To the extent to which the new music, unlike the old, pursues this aim in full consciousness, it makes a reality of something of which traditional music could only dream. Though irreconcilable with that tradition, it yet keeps faith with it; though different from it, a link is preserved. The new music may well be understood as the effort to do justice to all that the sharpened ear of the composer finds unresolved or antinomial in traditional music. Tradition is not imitation, regression or straightforward continuation, but the ability to gain insight into challenges which remained unresolved and which left flaws behind in the music. The new music faces up to these challenges. It remains open whether its idea of music can be realized in an antagonistic reality, or whether by virtue of the totality of its logic it will simply reproduce the contradictions it has inherited, and whether this supreme reproduction of the contradictions is identical with the crisis of musical meaning. On its own music has no power over this.

That the new music is still music does not remove the inevitable doubt about whether it will ever gain such a wide audience as traditional music and whether its idiom and style have any prospects of becoming second nature as was the case with tonal music. Of course this assumes that this second nature was a piece of good fortune and not just a childish one. Such considerations, which place their trust in a philosophical god of history and leave future generations to take the decisions that we are evading in the here and now, are unworthy. They act out the attitude of the contemplative, neutral observer who believes that the truth resides in the historical moment and is spontaneously revealed to us.

Whether the new music should be gratified by the slow progress it makes in gaining acceptance is uncertain. It must doubtless fear and desire it in equal measure. But there can be no doubt that the anxiety about whether it will ever be able to compete in general popularity with the traditional music as it is now administered by the culture industry is sheer hypocrisy. It is based on the idea of an unbroken historical continuity and a linear progression of consciousness which is refuted by the new music's very existence, as indeed by the entire history of music. The very notion that tonality is natural is itself an illusion. Tonality did not exist from the outset. It established itself in the course of a laborious process which lasted far longer than the few centuries during which the hegemony of major and minor has prevailed. The music that preceded it, the Florentine *Ars Nova*, for example, is just as unnatural and just as alien to contemporary ears, as are the works of the late Webern or Stockhausen in the proud ears of the normal listener. The semblance of naturalness which serves to disguise historical relationships inescapably attaches itself to the mind that insists that the rule of reason is unimpaired while surrounded by a world full of persistent irrationality.

Tonality is probably as ephemeral as the order of reality to which it belongs. But on the other hand, the relationship between music and society should not be thought to be as static and harmonious as was imagined in the age of High Liberalism. It is not permissible to equate quality with social acceptance, on the model of a market society which rewards socially useful labour with success and even defines it. The substance of the new music is determined to a certain extent by its hostility towards the administered society. It is idle to prophesy whether it could be released from this antagonistic situation and safely transferred to the future. Even if that were not possible, it would not in itself constitute a judgement on it. The fetish of an artistic value that endures through the ages is itself a piece of ideology.

No less questionable, however, is whether history will continue as before and whether true worth will survive for posterity, as the common belief would have it. Just as traditional music has

culminated in the synthetic illiteracy of the culture industry, it may well turn out that the extraordinary efforts which the new music makes and which it imposes on its audiences will come to grief on the rocks of barbarism. Its fate is not wholly in its own hands, but depends on whether it is possible to break through the fatedness of society, a fatedness before which every bar of its music stands as if hypnotized.

However, the solution is not to call – patiently or angrily – for an existence beyond society and its tensions, in line with the familiar market-based division into mass media and ivory tower. Music must not allow itself to be terrorized by the popular sociology which, with index finger raised in admonition, gives it to understand that its sense of responsibility is really an irresponsible *l'art pour l'art*. Nor should it let itself be intimidated by the more valid fear that it might relapse into Art Nouveau. The shadow of the antiquated; the splenetic mood of dogged blindness with which it burrows into a world of its own, is something that overwhelms all art nowadays which bears witness to the absolute negativity of the world, the world of Auschwitz. Whereas the truth is that it cannot bear witness to anything else except by making itself into an absolute. The theologians above all should be the first to be on their guard against a pharisaical attitude towards the new music, unless what they are secretly after is some sort of organizational glue.

When, as in Bach and Webern, music is offered up to God, should it not be perfectly self-contained rather than compliant in its commerce with men? Purely as a phenomenon music is much more than itself. Its transcendence is not externally preordained, but secreted within itself. Schubert's doubt that there is such a thing as cheerful music remains valid. The truth-content of music tolerates no positivity and it is only now that it incorporates this into its own intentionality, as a possible self-annulment. Music's ideal is finally to rid itself of the semblance [*Schein*] of the positive, as of the mythical web of delusion; but even to say this is perhaps over-positive. Nevertheless, that ideal is also perfectly practical. The alleged esotericism of the new music desires not only to help articulate its social content; which the language of

society suppresses. It communicates through non-communication; it aims to blast away the things blocking mankind's ears which they themselves hasten to close once more. A loss of tension makes itself apparent as soon as it renounces that explosive factor which, to use Brecht's term, we may call 'distanciation' [*Verfremdung*]. The fact that it does not aspire to acceptance, and is unwilling to join the universe of consumer goods does not imply that it relinquishes a relationship with an audience. But that relationship is not infinitely adaptable. It is instead the permanent, albeit Sisyphean effort to open people's ears, to penetrate the anthropological sound barrier. Not even the alienation [*Entfremdung*] between man and music may be taken as plain fact, or be dialectically hypostatized. It contains the potential for the abolition of the alien.

Alienation becomes a provocation in electronic music. It is a veritable incitement to revive all the phrases about the evils of mechanization, the destruction of personality and dehumanization which have accompanied the new music ever since it did away with the tried and tested clichés for the tried and tested feelings. Every self-righteous appeal to humanity in the midst of inhuman conditions should be viewed with the very greatest suspicion. There are no words for the noble, the good, the true and the beautiful that have not been violated and turned into their opposite – just as the Nazis could enthuse about the house, its roof resting on pillars, while torture went on in the cellars.¹¹ The positive values have degenerated into a mere device to prevent anyone reflecting on the fact that none of them has been made real in practice. Anyone who is truly concerned about them feels unable to express them in words and feels compelled to deconstruct them when others venture to do so. He thereby puts himself in the wrong and gains a reputation as the foe of all that is noble, good, true and beautiful, thus strengthening the

11. Adorno points to the Nazi appropriation of German culture by alluding here to Mignon's song in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 'Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen?' [Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees blossom?]. Its second stanza begins, 'Kennst du das Haus? Auf Säulen ruht sein Dach' [Knowest thou the house? On pillars rests its roof].

hegemony of evil. Anyone who wishes to speak of electronic music must draw attention to this vicious circle. Otherwise the whole ethical machinery will be set in motion and he will be sucked into it.

Nor should he be astonished to hear in tones of utter conviction that everything depends on people themselves, tones that set out to make us forget the extent to which people have become objects – namely, the objects of ‘human relations’.¹² Needless to say, the public interest in electronic music is obscurely mixed up with the hobby element it contains. It profits from the ubiquitous replacement of ends, even spiritual ends, by means: by the pleasure taken in machines that work, the predominance of the how over the what. But even such assertions as this require caution. No art, not even the highly rationalized art of the present, is entirely transparent. It must be remembered that the products of purely unspiritual technical efforts may well be a proving ground for the cunning of reason, that is, the rationality of objective spiritual tendencies which would never be made real if pursued simply by the conscious subject rather than in terms of the concrete material.

More plausible is the suspicion that electronics, which after all developed as a technology independently of music, is external to music and that it has no internal relationship with the immanent laws of music. I have not myself worked in the realm of electronic music and so am not qualified by my own experience to pronounce on the relationship between electronic music and musical meaning. Moreover, I find the scientific aspect of art quite alien and am unable to forget that chief among the impulses underlying the new music was the onslaught on the stubborn power of a self-perpetuating reason, ambitious to control the whole of nature. Admittedly, its no less stubborn insistence on the immediacy of living creativity was not able to realize itself aesthetically. The greatest example of the tension between these two poles is to be found in the works of Webern.

But so much seems to me to be beyond doubt: electronics and

12: Adorno used the English expression.

internal musical developments are converging with each other. No idea of a pre-established harmony is called for by way of explanation. The rational control over the musical raw material and the rationality of the production of sound by electronic means both ultimately obey the identical basic principle. The composer has at his disposal – at least in theory – a continuum consisting of pitch, dynamics and duration, but up to now, not of timbre. As far as timbres are concerned, even in their most comprehensive array, in the orchestra, they tend to occur independently of each other and sporadically. Their anarchic origins continue to have their effect.

Even today there is no scale of timbres comparable to those of intervals or dynamics. Electronic music promises to make good this defect which is familiar to every musician. It is an aspect of the tendency in the new music to integrate all the dimensions of music in one continuum. Stockhausen has explicitly erected this into a programme. Admittedly, according to his statements in the sixth issue of *Die Reihe*, the electronic timbre spectrum does not seem to be identical with the range of all possible timbres and so does not automatically include more than a selection of the non-electronic vocal and instrumental timbres. For this reason the committed electronic composers, those who fully exploit the constructive potential of the medium and are not just interested in its technical novelty, demand that their music should satisfy the specific conditions of the electronic continuum and should be appropriate to its material. Given the fact that composers have only seriously experimented with it over the last few years, no blame can attach to them for failing to go beyond the initial stages – Stockhausen’s *Jünglinge* being the most striking instance hitherto. The same may be said of the fact that electronic music is still shot through with the reminiscences of other sound media, notably the organ and the piano. The criticism that many electronic pieces lack consistency and modernity is much too convenient a pretext for those who want to nip the modern movement in the bud. There is no call to fall into ecstasy over the products of electronic music like jazz fans. But the emergence of electronic music does answer a need which existed in new

instrumental music from the outset, above all in the idea of timbral melody [*Klangfarbenmelodie*].

Thus the new music has two extreme tendencies. On the one hand, it is emancipated expressiveness; on the other, there is electronic music whose material laws seem to preclude the subjective intervention of the composer, just as they preclude that of the interpreter. The fact that these extremes actually meet confirms the objective trend towards unity. In the final analysis it leads to the liquidation of the concept of new music. This is not because the new music is simply absorbed into a larger *musica perennis*, but because music in general will be absorbed into the new music. The latter brings to fulfilment the idea contained in all traditional music. It is for this reason that the new music is obsolete as a particular category; it is a suspect subheading. The concept has become irrelevant because by the side of the new music all other music production has become impossible. It has degenerated into kitsch. The distinction between new music and music in general becomes the distinction between good and bad music as such.

(1960)

Vers une musique informelle

In memory of Wolfgang Steinecke

Dire cela, sans savoir quoi.

Beckett, *L'Innommable*

Anyone of my age and experience who is both a musician and who thinks about music finds himself in a difficult quandary. One side of it consists in the attitude 'so far and no further'. In other words, it consists in clinging to one's youth as if modernity were one's own private monopoly. This means resisting at all costs everything which remains inaccessible to one's own experience or at least one's primary, basic reactions. This had once been the attitude of confirmed Wagnerians when confronted by Strauss, and the Straussians adopted it in their turn as a defence against the new music of the Schoenberg persuasion. We are perfectly modern ourselves; who are they to offer us tuition? Sometimes, of course, my narcissism, which asserts itself even though I can see through it, has a hard task persuading itself that the countless composers of music that can only be understood with the aid of diagrams and whose musical inspiration remains wholly invisible to me can really all be so much more musical, intelligent and progressive than myself. I frequently find myself unable to repress the thought that their system-driven music is not so very different from the false notes arbitrarily introduced into the neo-Classical concertos and wind ensembles of the music festivals of thirty or forty years ago. Musicians are usually truants from maths classes; it would be a terrible fate for them to end up in the hands of the maths teacher after all. The speculative artist above